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ABSTRACT

Pregnant and parenting adolescents represent a unique and challenging problem for educational systems. Of the 17,051 women who become pregnant every day in America, 2,795 or 16% of them are adolescents. The self-esteem and locus of control of 85 pregnant and parenting teens enrolled in the Ohio Graduation, Reality, Dual Role Skills (GRADS) Program were measured and compared to the scores of 85 non-parenting peers. Self-esteem was measured using Rosenburg's Self-Esteem Scale. Locus of control was measured by Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale. No significant differences in the mean scores were discovered. This supported the assumption that involvement in the GRADS Program allowed pregnant and parenting teens to retain a level of self-esteem and locus of control equivalent to their non-parenting peers. The results of this study substantiate the worth of in-school support groups for high risk adolescents. (JBJ)

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Adolescent Parenting: Contrasts in Self-Esteem and Locus of control

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Abstract

The self-esteem and locus control of 85 pregnant and parenting teens enrolled in the GRADS program was measured and compared to the scores of their non-parenting peers. No significant differences in the mean scores were discovered. The results of this study substantiate the worth of in-school support groups for high risk adolescents.

Introduction

Purpose

Pregnant and parenting adolescents represent a unique and challenging problem for our educational system. Of the 17,051 women who become pregnant every day in America, 2,795 or 16% of them are adolescents. Of this group of adolescents, 1,295 give birth, 1,106 have abortions and 372 miscarry (Children's Defense Fund, 1990). In the Ohio Graduation, Reality, Dual Role Skills (GRADS) Program, a state funded education and support group for pregnant and parenting adolescents in school, the 1991-92 enrollment was 10,594 (1,166 males, 9,428 females). There were 229 units in existence which consisted of 241 teachers serving 572 schools in 417 different school districts (Ohio Department of Education Vocational and Career Education, 1993).

The major problem that GRADS and many other in-school support programs face is in helping pregnant and parenting adolescents stay in school and develop attitudes and characteristics which will enable them to better cope with the unique challenges they face. Two factors often cited in literature which are thought to have a bearing on an adolescent's chances of coping successfully are measure of self-esteem and internality or externality as expressed in measures of locus of control. The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a difference between the self-esteem and the orientation of locus of control between parenting and pregnant adolescents in a school support group (GRADS) and non-parenting adolescents. While several studies have been done, no one has focused on the GRADS program in Ohio.

Background

Previous studies have examined the self-esteem and orientation of locus of control of pregnant and parenting adolescents with varying results. Some of these studies focused on these variables as predictors for the likelihood of teenagers becoming pregnant. Thompson (1984) found that parenting adolescents scored significantly below non-parenting adolescents in total positive-general level of self-esteem. This study concluded that in-school support groups would be one means to assist in behavioral change for these concerns.

In contrast, by comparing teenage females without children to parenting teenagers Streetman (1987) examined the differences in self-esteem possibly associated with teenage pregnancy and parenting. This study reported finding no significant differences between teen mothers and those without children as measured on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Scale and the Rosenburg Self-Esteem Scale. In another study, Plotnick and Butler (1991) determined that girls who score higher on self-esteem measures were less likely to become unwed mothers. This study also indicated that girls with the strongest internal locus of control orientation were less likely to have children than those with the weakest internal locus of control. The findings of McIntyre, Saudargaus, and Howard (1991) "support the assumption that external attribution of control is associated with adolescent pregnancy." The findings further suggest external attributional orientation poses risks not only for the occurrence of adolescent pregnancy but also for possible further risks for both the adolescent mothers and their offspring.

While most studies tend to consider self-esteem and locus of control as predictors or descriptors of likelihood of adolescent pregnancy, Walters, Walters and McKenry (1986) found no relevance to either variable as either a predictor or descriptor citing other variables as more significant.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the self-esteem and internality of locus of control of two specific groups. The groups consisted of: pregnant or parenting adolescents in the GRADS program (experimental group); and non-pregnant or parenting females (control group). The question of concern is: Does a significant difference exist between the self-esteem and locus of control of pregnant and parenting adolescents in the GRADS program and non-parenting adolescents. The assumption was that no significant difference existed between the groups. This assumption was based on the belief that the training and education received by the adolescents in the GRADS program offset any difference that might have otherwise occurred without such a support program.

Method

Subjects

Participants in this study were 85 pregnant and parenting adolescents enrolled in the Graduation, Reality and Dual-Role Skills (GRADS) Program. An equal number (85) of non-parenting adolescent females were randomly selected

from a group of 115 surveyed and matched to the GRADS group by age. Groups contained equal numbers of girls at each age level: 15 years, 7 per group; 16 years, 20 per group; 17 years, 32 per group; 18 years, 22 per group; 19 years, 4 per group. The participants were enrolled in public comprehensive high schools and vocational schools in a five-county area of Northwest Ohio. Those participating represented rural, suburban and urban areas with mixed incomes. All participants were Caucasian.

Measures

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was measured using Rosenburg's (1965) scale that was developed on a sample of over 5,000 high school students in New York State. This scale measures the self acceptance aspect of self-esteem and was designed with brevity and ease of administration in mind (Robinson, 1973). The scale consists of ten Likert-type items answered on a four point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Robinson (1963) reports a .60 reliability when correlated with Coopersmith's Self-esteem Inventory (scored as ten items).

Locus of control. All participants also completed Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (I-E Scale). Locus of control is a personality construct reflecting one's belief about who controls behavior and life events. Rotter's I-E Scale (1966) is a 29-item scale with six fillers scored in such a way that a high score reflects an external orientation. Rotter (1966) reports an internal consistency coefficient (Kudor-Richardson) of .70 obtained from a sample of 400 college students.

Method

Students enrolled in GRADS classes and in select high school classes (Biology, Accounting, Home Economics, Job Training) were administered the Rosenburg Self-Esteem Scale and the Rotter I-E Scale in one sitting as a class. In addition students were randomly selected from study halls and were asked to complete the instruments individually. Directions were provided by the classroom teacher. Participants were asked to include their age and gender. Scores from male participants were later excluded. In some instances, classroom teachers reviewed student responses as they completed the scale to allow the student a measure of their self-esteem and locus of control. Instruments which were incorrectly completed were discarded.

Results

The mean Rosenburg score for the GRADS sample was 29.36 (SD = 4.77) with scores ranging from 20 to 39. The non-GRADS sample produced a mean score of 29.88 (SD = 5.88) with scores ranging from 10 to 40. A comparison of the two groups using the t - test for independent samples failed to reach conventional levels for significance $t(168) = .63$, $p = .01$.

When presented with the Rotter I-E Scale, the GRADS sample produced a mean score of 10.85 (SD = 2.96) which was higher than the national stratified high school sample mean of 8.5 (SD = 3.74). The GRADS sample mean was, however, lower than the mean produced by a similar sample in previous research (M = 12, SD = 2.76, n = 37) (Thompson, 1984). By comparison, the mean score of the

non-GRADS sample (M = 11.45, SD = 3.42) was higher than the GRADS sample. This study produced no significant difference in mean scores between the two test samples $t(168) = -1.22$, $p = .01$. The study did, however, indicate a higher external locus of control within both sample groups in comparison to the national mean.

Discussion

In this study, parenting and non-parenting adolescents were compared in the areas of self-esteem and locus of control. The findings indicated no significant difference in the mean scores of the two groups on the variables tested. This supports the previous assumption of the authors that no significant differences existed between the groups and that involvement in the GRADS Program allowed pregnant and parenting teens to retain a level of self-esteem and locus of control equivalent to their non-parenting peers. Literature supports these findings. As Thompson (1984) points out, support groups are a means to assist the "enhancement of social competence and the ability to develop interpersonal relationships." McCullough (1991) further states that "practical assistance, combined with esteem-building exercises and empathetic understanding is an important component in the development of effective coping skills."

It is the opinion of the authors that all adolescents are at risk for teen pregnancy. Walters (1986) states that "pregnancy in adolescence is coincidental" and psychological characteristics are not good predictors of early pregnancy. The

authors conclude that, rather than developing models of risk, time would be better invested in the continuation and improvement of the present support concept. To further investigate the effectiveness of support programs, the authors suggest a study comparing psychological traits of pregnant and parenting teens who are not enrolled in in-school support groups with their enrolled peers.

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